HOWARD COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Office of the Health Officer
8930 Stanford Blvd | Columbia, MD 21045
410.313.6300 - Voice/Relay
410.313.6303 - Fax
1.866.313.6300 - Toll Free

Maura J. Rossman, M.D., Health Officer

February 22, 2022

Dear Community,

HCHD continues to follow many metrics to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Howard County residents and to inform our recommendations. The metrics include, case rate, percent change in case rates, test positivity rate, testing turn-around time, contact tracing efforts, hospital bed occupancy, ICU capacity, and COVID deaths. For the first time in three months, none of these metrics are in the red, or danger zone. The current 7-day average case rate is 10.79 daily new cases per 100,000 and our CDC community transmission level is now designated as substantial. This is an important milestone indicating marked improvement in the prevalence of disease within our county.

When community transmission remains high or substantial, (>7 daily new cases per 100,000 or >50 total new cases per 100,000 in the past 7 days), masking remains an effective mitigation strategy when indoors, especially when physical distancing is not possible, and outbreaks exist.

You may have noticed an uptick in our cases last week as reported by the CDC. This is related to delayed reporting of certain cases. On February 16, 2022, Maryland reported historical cases at the county level that currently appear as an artificial spike in community transmission, but which actually reflect cases from December 2021-February 2022. CDC and Maryland are collaborating to allocate these data to their correct dates.* This data import will affect our case rate metrics until the issue is resolved making cases rate data imprecise. To help us adjust for this data issue, we analyzed case rate trends prior to February 16 and project an average 35% decline over the next several weeks. I am cautiously optimistic that the improvement in our metrics over the next two weeks may allow further relaxation of masking policies, including in schools.

Thank you for doing your part to help us control the spread of COVID-19. Go to howardcountymd.gov/health/covid-19 for information on testing, masks and vaccine sites. Please remember:

- **Get vaccinated** as soon as you can and get a **Booster** when eligible.
- **Mask** if you are indoors in public places, around those whose vaccine status you don't know.
- **Stay home** if you are not feeling well.
- **Test** if you have been exposed or have symptoms.
- **Isolate** if you test positive.
- **Quarantine** if you are identified as a close contact following CDC guidelines.
- **Enjoy the warmer weather**.

Sincerely,

Maura J. Rossman, MD

*https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county